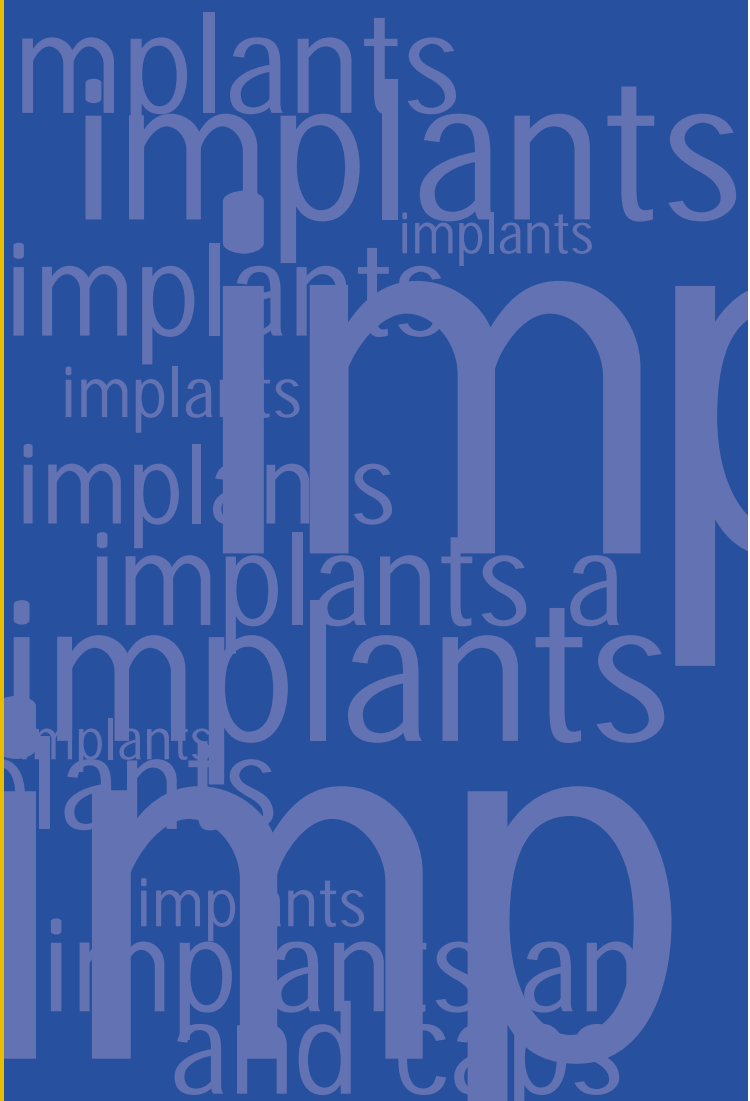


# your guide to the contraceptive implant

Helping you choose the method  
of contraception that is best for you



# The contraceptive implant

An implant is a small flexible rod that is placed just under your skin in your upper arm. It releases a progestogen hormone similar to the natural progesterone that women produce in their ovaries. The implant that is available in the UK is called Implanon. It works for up to 3 years.



## How effective is an implant?

How effective any contraceptive is depends on how old you are, how often you have sex and whether you follow the instructions.

If 100 sexually active women don't use any contraception, 80 to 90 will become pregnant in a year.

The implant is over 99% effective. This means less than one woman in every 100 women using the implant will get pregnant in a year. The implant is a long-acting reversible method of contraception. All long-acting methods are very effective because while they are being used you do not have to remember to take or use contraception.



## How does an implant work?

The main way it works is to stop your ovaries releasing an egg each month (ovulation). It also:

- Thickens the mucus from your cervix. This makes it difficult for sperm to move through your cervix

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and reach an egg.

- Makes the lining of your womb thinner so it is less likely to accept a fertilised egg.



### Where can I get an implant?

Only a doctor or nurse who has been trained to fit implants can insert the implant. You can go to a family planning or sexual health clinic or to the doctor or nurse at a general practice. All treatment is free and confidential (see page 10).



### Can anyone use an implant?

Most women who want to use an implant can have one fitted. The doctor or nurse will need to ask you about your own and your family's medical history to make sure that the implant is suitable. You should tell them about any illnesses or operations you have had. An implant **may** not be suitable for you if:

- you think you might already be pregnant
- you do not want your periods to change
- you take certain medicines.

You have now, or have had in the past:

- breast cancer
- unexplained vaginal bleeding (for example, bleeding between periods or after sex)
- thrombosis (blood clots) in any vein
- a heart attack or stroke (serious arterial disease)
- active liver disease.



### What are the advantages of an implant?

- It works for three years.
- It does not interrupt sex.
- You can use it if you are breastfeeding.
- It is a good method if you cannot use estrogens

(hormones), like those in the combined pill.

- Your normal fertility will return as soon as the implant is taken out.
- It offers some protection against pelvic inflammatory disease.
- It may give you some protection against cancer of the womb.
- It may reduce heavy, painful periods.



### What are the disadvantages of an implant?

- Your periods may change in a way that is not acceptable to you (see page 8).
- Other side-effects include acne and headaches. Some women report having tender breasts, bloating, and changes in mood and sex drive.
- It is not suitable for women using enzyme-inducing drugs (see page 8).
- It requires a small procedure to fit and remove it.
- An implant does not protect you against sexually transmitted infections, so you may need to use condoms as well.



### Are there any risks?

- Very rarely, soon after the implant is put in it can cause an infection in your arm, where it has been inserted.
- Research about the risk of breast cancer and hormonal contraception is complex and contradictory. Current research suggests that women who use hormonal contraception appear to have a small increase in risk of being diagnosed with breast cancer compared to women who don't use hormonal contraception. Further research is ongoing.

### Q When can I start using an implant?

A

You can have an implant fitted at any time in your menstrual cycle if it is certain that you are not pregnant. If the implant is put in during the first 5 days of your period you will be immediately protected against pregnancy.

If the implant is put in on any other day you will not be protected against pregnancy for the first 7 days after it has been fitted. So you will need to use another method of contraception, such as condoms, during this time.

### Q I've just had a baby. Can I use an implant?

A

You can have an implant put in 3 weeks (21 days) after you have given birth. If the implant is put in on or before day 21 you will be protected from pregnancy immediately. If the implant is put in later than day 21 you will need to use an extra method of contraception for 7 days.

An implant can be used safely while you are breastfeeding and will not affect your milk supply.

### Q Can I use an implant after a miscarriage or abortion?

A

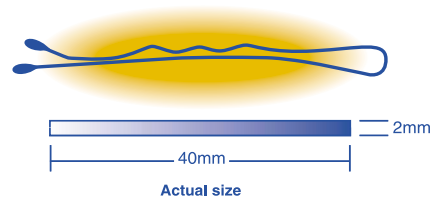
The implant can be put in immediately after a miscarriage or abortion. You will be protected against pregnancy immediately.

### Q How is an implant put in?

A

The implant, which is the size of a hair grip, is placed just under your skin in the inner area of your upper arm. A trained doctor or nurse will give you a local anaesthetic to numb the part of your arm where the implant will go, so it won't hurt. It only takes a few minutes to put in and feels similar to having an injection. You won't need any stitches. After it has been fitted the doctor or nurse will check your arm to make sure that the implant is in position.

The area may be tender for a day or two and may



be bruised and slightly swollen. The doctor or nurse will put a dressing on it to keep it clean and dry and to help stop the bruising. Keep this dressing on for a few days and try not to knock the area.

Don't worry about knocking the implant once the area has healed. It should not break or move around your arm. Most women can feel the implant with their fingers, but usually you can't see it. You will be able to do normal activities and move your arm.

You do not need to have a vaginal examination or cervical smear to have an implant inserted.

Q

A

### How is an implant taken out?

An implant can be left in place for 3 years or it can be taken out sooner if you decide you want to stop using it. A specially trained doctor or nurse must take it out. The doctor or nurse will feel your arm to locate the implant and then give you a local anaesthetic injection in the area where the implant is. They will then make a tiny cut in your skin and gently pull the implant out. They will put a dressing on the arm to keep it clean and dry and to help stop the bruising. Keep this dressing on for a few days.

It usually only takes a few minutes to remove an implant. If the implant has been put in correctly, it should not be difficult to remove. Occasionally, an implant is difficult to feel under the skin and it may not be so easy to remove. If this happens, you may be referred to a specialist centre to have it removed with the help of an ultrasound scan.

If you want to carry on using an implant, the doctor or nurse can put a new one in at the same time. You will continue to be protected against pregnancy.

If another implant is not put in you will stop being protected against pregnancy immediately.



### Can anything make an implant less effective?

Some medicines may make an implant less effective. These include some of the medicines used to treat HIV, epilepsy and tuberculosis, and the complementary medicine St John's Wort. These are called enzyme inducers. If you are using these medicines it will be recommended that you use additional contraception, such as condoms, or that you change your method of contraception. Always tell your doctor, nurse or dentist that you are using an implant if you are prescribed any medicines.

The Implant is **not** affected by common antibiotics, diarrhoea or vomiting.

It is important to have your implant changed at the right time. If it is not you will not be protected against pregnancy. If you have sex without using another method of contraception and don't wish to become pregnant you may want to consider using emergency contraception (see page 11).



### How will an implant affect my periods?

Your periods will probably change.

- In some women periods will stop completely.
- Some women will have irregular periods or spotting (bleeding between periods).
- Some women will have periods that last longer and are heavier.

These changes may be a nuisance but they are not harmful. If you do have prolonged bleeding the doctor or nurse may be able to give you some additional hormone or medicine that can help control the bleeding. They may also check that the bleeding is not due to other causes, such as an infection.



### What should I do if I want to stop using the implant or try to get pregnant?

If you want to stop using the implant you need to go back to the doctor or nurse and ask them to take it out. Your periods and normal fertility will return quickly and it is possible to get pregnant before you have your first period. If you don't wish to become pregnant then you should use another method of contraception from the day that your implant is removed.

If you want to try for a baby it helps to wait for one natural period before trying to get pregnant. This means that the pregnancy can be dated more accurately and you can start pre-pregnancy care such as taking folic acid and stopping smoking. You can ask your doctor or nurse for further advice. Don't worry if you do get pregnant sooner, it will not harm the baby.



### If I have to go into hospital for an operation should I stop using the implant?

No. It is not necessary to stop using the implant if you are having an operation. However, it is always recommended that you tell the doctor that you are using the implant.



### How long can I use the implant for?

If you have no medical problems you can continue to use the implant until you reach the menopause. Each implant will last for 3 years and will then need to be changed.



### What should I do if I think that I am pregnant?

The implant is a highly effective method of contraception. If you have not taken any medicine that might make the implant less effective and have had the implant changed on time it is very unlikely

that you will become pregnant. If you think that you might be pregnant then you can do a pregnancy test or speak to your doctor or nurse as soon as possible. If you do get pregnant while you are using the implant there is no evidence that it will harm the baby. The implant should be removed if you want to continue with the pregnancy.



**Are there any other types of implants?**

At one time in the UK a contraceptive implant called Norplant was available. This consisted of 6 rods that were placed under the skin of the arm and provided protection from pregnancy for 5 years. Although this is no longer available in the UK some women may still be using this type of implant.



**How often do I need to see a doctor or nurse?**

You only need to go to the clinic or your general practice if you have any problems with your implant or when it needs to be replaced. If you have any problems, questions or want the implant removed you should contact your doctor or nurse.



**How do I find out about contraception services?**

Contraception is free for women and men of all ages through the National Health Service.

- You can find out about **all** clinics from **sexual health direct**, run by **fpa** on 0845 310 1334 or visit [www.fpa.org.uk](http://www.fpa.org.uk).
- You can find details of all services including general practices and pharmacies at [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk). In England and Wales you can call NHS Direct on 0845 46 47, in Scotland NHS 24 on 08454 24 24 and in Northern Ireland you can call your local health board (details are in the phone directory or at [www.healthandcareni.co.uk](http://www.healthandcareni.co.uk)).
- You can also get details of your nearest

contraception, genitourinary medicine (GUM) or sexual health clinic from a telephone directory, health centre, local pharmacy, hospital, midwife, health visitor or advice centre.

- You can get details of GUM or sexual health clinics from the Sexual Health Information Line on 0800 567 123 or at [www.playingsafely.co.uk](http://www.playingsafely.co.uk).
- You can find details of young people's services from Brook on 0800 0185 023 or from Sexwise on 0800 28 29 30, or at [www.ruthinking.co.uk](http://www.ruthinking.co.uk).

**Emergency contraception**

If you have had sex without using contraception or think your method might have failed there are two emergency methods you can use.

- The emergency hormonal pill – must be taken up to 3 days (72 hours) after sex. It is more effective, the earlier it is taken after sex.
- An IUD – must be fitted up to 5 days after sex, or up to 5 days after the earliest time you could have released an egg (ovulation).

Ask your doctor or nurse about getting emergency pills in advance, just in case you need them.

**Sexually transmitted infections**

Most methods of contraception do not protect you from sexually transmitted infections.

Male and female condoms, when used correctly and consistently, can help protect against sexually transmitted infections. Diaphragms and caps may also protect against some sexually transmitted infections. If you can, avoid using condoms containing Nonoxinol 9 (spermicidally lubricated), as this does not protect against HIV and may even increase the risk of infection.

## How fpa can help you

**sexual health direct** is a nationwide service run by fpa. It provides:

- confidential information and advice on contraception, sexually transmitted infections, planning a pregnancy, pregnancy choices and sexual wellbeing
- details of family planning clinics, sexual health clinics and other sexual health services
- a wide range of leaflets on individual methods of contraception, common sexually transmitted infections, abortion and planning a pregnancy.

### fpa helplines

#### UK

helpline 0845 310 1334

*9am to 6pm Monday to Friday*

#### Northern Ireland

helpline 028 90 325 488 (Belfast) or

helpline 028 71 260 016 (Derry)

*9am to 5pm Monday to Thursday, 9am to 4.30pm Friday*

#### Scotland

helpline 0141 576 5088

*9am to 5pm Monday to Thursday, 9am to 4.30pm Friday*

or visit fpa's website [www.fpa.org.uk](http://www.fpa.org.uk)

### A final word

This leaflet can only give you basic information about the contraceptive implant. The information is based on the evidence and medical opinion available at the time this leaflet was printed. Different people may give you different advice on certain points. All methods of contraception come with a Patient Information Leaflet which provides detailed information about the method.

Remember - contact your doctor, practice nurse or a family planning clinic if you are worried or unsure about anything.

